

Nomination for 1-135 ARB, MOARNG

The 1-135th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion (ARB) has excelled in every quantifiable measure throughout 2013 by completing two unprecedented training events and deploying in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Any of these three single events alone would measure an extremely successful year for any National Guard battalion across the nation.

In April 2012, the 1-135th ARB received its Notification of Sourcing, identifying the unit for a mobilization and deployment in support of Overseas Contingency Operations. At that time, the battalion had yet to receive its full complement of AH-64D Apache helicopters and was only six months into the prescribed three-year pre-mobilization Unit Fielding and Training Program (UFTP) model. Through the remainder of 2012 and January 2013, the 1-135th ARB completed an aggressive RL progression and continuation training plan in less than half of the allocated three years to complete Phases I-III (home station training) of UFTP.

Due to this accelerated timeline, on 2 February 2013 the battalion began an extremely complex 30-day training event to meet the FORSCOM requirement of an aerial gunnery qualification within 180-days of arrival into theater; while also aggressively utilizing the time and resources at hand to internally plan and execute a number of pre-mobilization requirements and conduct high altitude training. The battalion conducted a joint movement utilizing Charter Air, Air Force C-130 aircraft, AH-64D Apaches, and commercial line haul to move all personnel and equipment from Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, to Boise, Idaho, over a five-day period. This was amongst the largest and most complex logistical movements the Missouri National Guard has ever conducted. This also included a 1,800 nautical mile flight each way of 18 AH-64D Apaches with minimal delays due to weather or maintenance. Ultimately, 23 aircrews qualified on Tables VII/VIII, the most in the 1-135th ARB's history during a single gunnery event, exceeding the First Army requirement of greater than 85% combat crews qualified prior to mobilization.

Operating concurrently to the aerial gunnery was Theater Specific Individual Requirements Training for 293 Soldiers and Combat Life Saver training for 187 Soldiers within the battalion. Perhaps the most significant pre-mobilization achievement was the conduct of High Altitude Mountain Environmental Training Strategy (HAMETS) prior to mobilization. This training is a requirement prior to deploying to Afghanistan, and the 1-135th ARB was first National Guard AH-64D Apache battalion to conduct this Program of Instruction prior to mobilization. The battalion utilized the mountainous terrain around Boise with HAMETS instructors provided by the 21st Cavalry Regiment to conduct this training. Overall, 30 1-135th ARB aviators received environmental training prior to mobilization, an accomplishment not achieved by any other National Guard AH-64D battalion prior to mobilization. Ultimately, the battalion expended 1,513 rocket, 10,654 rounds of 30mm, consumed over 60,000 gallons of JP-8 and safely executed 1,296 flight hours to complete this pre-mobilization training; a significant single accomplishment for any National Guard organization.

The 1-135th ARB mobilized on 23 March 2013 and arrived at Fort Hood, Texas, on 26 March 2013. From the outset of resident UFTP, the battalion was praised for its professional approach to training, innovative ways to seek additional training opportunities and willingness to learn from the First Army trainers. During the counter Improvised Explosive Device lanes, the battalion augmented the training with Attack Weapons Teams overhead to provide an additional training opportunity for the aviators and convoy personnel. This led to high praise from the Observer Controllers conducting the training. They stated, "Your unit is proficient on the individual and collective training requirements covered for your CAT I and CAT II personnel. 1-135 Attack Reconnaissance Battalion is a very professional and motivated unit that has good, engaged leadership driving the team forward. This turned out to be a great combined training event using your internal AH-64s and aviators to support your own patrols. This is the first time we have had both UH-60 and AH-64D support during our Mounted Combat Patrol lane and it turned out to be a very good learning experience for everyone involved."

Upon the beginning of aviation specific "blue" training, the battalion set the standard during the Company Live Situational Training Exercise (STX) from the beginning of the first mission. When Alpha Company, 1-135th ARB took off on time for their first mission, the Tactical Engagement Simulation System operator marveled, stating they were the first company in five rotations to take off on time for the first Company Live STX mission. This level of professionalism was displayed throughout the Company STX training as greater than 95% of all missions took off on time and only one mission was cancelled due to maintenance.

During UFTP the 1-135th ARB conducted a battalion movement to Brownwood, Texas, for the Culminating Training Event (CTE). The battalion showcased its ability to function as an aviation task force by integrating UH-60 assault and MEDEVAC aircraft into its formation to conduct full-spectrum aviation task force operations. The 1-135th ARB responded thoughtfully, aggressively and appropriately to all scenarios presented during the CTE and validated as the sixth Army National Guard AH-64D Longbow battalion. In total during the 118-day UFTP, the 1-135th ARB flew over 2,200 flight hours, launched and recovered 1,019 missions, executed 108 Air Mission Requests to include six air assaults, conducted three phase maintenance inspections, maintained a 79% Operational Readiness Rate, pumped over 231,000 gallons of fuel, fired over 9,300 rounds of 30mm, 1,000 rockets, and 32 Hellfire missiles. This led to COL Kevin Vizzarri, the 166th Aviation Brigade Commander, to send the following message to the Adjutant General of the State of Missouri through COL Greg Barrack, the Senior Army Advisor to the Missouri National Guard. "Jim Schreffler and his team were very mission-focused, there was no buffoonery, no nonsense. [I wish] that every unit, its leadership and Soldiers were as wired as the 1/135th, and that they [are] fully up for their challenging mission: operating in 3 distinct AOs, falling in on another unit's aircraft (which will return to MO when MC), forming a mixed unit with AC elements and various aircraft types, etc. Please tell your TAG personally that I thank him for the quality of these Missouri Guardsmen and that you can brag on these guys!"

The 1-135th ARB deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom on 23 July 2013, providing one Attack Company and additional maintenance support to Regional Command (RC) East and West. The Battalion Headquarters deployed to RC North and assumed responsibility as the only aviation task force in RC North, becoming known as Task Force (TF) Reaper. TF Reaper is comprised of 34 helicopters, which includes eight AH-64D Apaches, six CH-47 Chinooks, 12 UH-60 Blackhawks and eight UH-60 MEDEVAC Blackhawks. The task force provides the only full spectrum rotary wing aviation capability to the RC North Commander, responsible for nine provinces spanning 45,037 square miles. TF Reaper is also operating in a coalition environment as the entirety of RC North is operated under North Atlantic Treaty Organization leadership.

TF Reaper provides the RC North Commander with 24-hour quick reaction force, General Support personnel and cargo movement, heavy lift, air assault, convoy security and route and area reconnaissance assets. Additionally, the TF provides Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) with a Direct Support heavy lift and attack capability nightly to support special operations forces throughout RC North.

Most notably, less than one month after assuming authority in RC North, TF Reaper planned and executed an Aviation Expeditionary Task Force operation that deployed to the Warduj Valley of the Badakshan Province, Afghanistan, during Operation Eagle Claw. The operation was in support of CJSOTF and the 209th Afghanistan National Army Corps consisting of over 2,250 coalition Soldiers and Afghan partners. This expeditionary operation was the largest of its kind since the initial invasion of OEF. The operation proved to be a resounding success and helped set the stage for the defeat of insurgent militants during the 2013 fighting season.

TF Reaper has also been extremely active in conducting retrograde operations throughout RC North in preparation for troop withdrawals and to set the conditions for the Resolute Support Mission. The TF has planned, coordinated and executed the reduction of task force containers in RC North by over 65%, reducing from 232 total containers to less than 80. An aggressive plan has also been developed to reduce the overall aviation footprint on Camp Pratt by 25% in order to prepare for closure altogether. This plan will ensure no decrease in aviation operational capability throughout RC North leading up to the 2014 Afghan Elections while also ensuring retrograde operations continue on the appropriate timeline.

The 1-135th ARB has completed an extraordinary year which has seen the battalion validate as an AH-64D Longbow battalion and assume responsibility as an Aviation Task Force headquarters fully integrated into the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade conducting combat operations in the most rugged and austere environment for rotary wing operations in the world. They are truly an example for all other National Guard aviation battalions to emulate.